

"Dreaming Dreams and Seeing Visions"

by Reverend Elder Troy D. Perry

Twenty years ago I started sending the following letter to Christian Churches and organizations:

"I am not a creature from the outer darkness, as you seem to believe, I am a homosexual, and like most of the members of your Churches, a man of flesh and blood. I am a member of the Church....and an integral part of its people.

I have a few things to say. Because I am not a diplomat, I do not have to mince words, nor do I have to please you or even persuade you. I owe you very little. You did not create this body; you do not live in it; you do not have to defend it when individuals try to destroy it; and I will not let you tell me what I can do with it!

Because of my sexual orientation, you try to condemn me. For two thousand years I have watched you try to destroy my brothers and sisters. Many homosexuals have had trials of 'cruel mocking and scourging, yes, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were cast asunder, were tempted, were slain with sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; people of whom the world was not worthy.'

You have watched as we were placed on the rack, thrown to the flames, banished from the midst of society, and you have never said a word! Your heart cried out when, after almost four hundred years, you saw the plight of the black people in this country. When the water hoses, cattle prods and dogs were used on black men, women and children, a muffled scream escaped your throats. At once your blind eyes opened to some of the social injustices around you. You marched with Dr. Martin Luther King in Birmingham, Washington, D.C., Selma and then that day in Memphis. that terrible day in Memphis, your eyes became a fountain of tears. The mighty had fallen, and you wept!

Sometimes you still weep, for the American Indians, for the Mexican Americans, and for the lonely child-soldiers....on both sides, that are dying in a dirty little war in Viet Nam.

But what of the homosexuals? Did you weep when one was beaten to death by the police in Los Angeles? When another was shot in the back and killed in a park in Florida? Does it upset you that there are riots in New York ...and that homosexuals demonstrating for their rights in California are arrested for demanding their civil rights? If it does, you have not shown it. Jesus said, 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.'

Oh, Church, if only you would keep the teachings that were delivered to you.. 'Love the Lord thy God with all your heart, mind, strength, and your neighbor as yourself.' But you haven't. You have rejected the homosexual...and now...for the most part he has rejected you!

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I am thankful that I still have a God. You cannot take Him away from me! He is the Author and Finisher of my Faith. His name is spelled LOVE! L O V E!!!!

Church...if you will not let me worship Him in your Temples, I will worship Him in the Cathedral of my heart, and build for Him a temple where others can worship with me.

Church...it is you that left me, not I who left you. You would try to make me believe that He does care for me, but I know; 'though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me!'

Oh! Bride of Christ! I pray that you will wake up and call ALL of your CHILDREN back to your bosom and soul. Back home to family and friends and loved ones. Church, only you can make that possible!"

And build a dream we have. It's called the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. This last month in preparing to write this article, I started listing some of what I consider the differences the U.F.M.C.C. has made in the gay and lesbian community of the world.

1. We purchased the first piece of property ever owned by an openly gay and lesbian organization in the U.S.A.
2. We opened the first home for gay and lesbian homeless in America (the old Virgil Street parsonage).
3. We organized the first gay-oriented AT and gay AA chapter in America.
4. We started the first gay/lesbian hotline and crisis center in the U.S.A.
5. We helped found the first Jewish Temple in America with a special outreach to the gay & lesbian community (Beth Chayim Chadashim).
6. We started one of the first schools of higher learning for gays and lesbians in the world (Samaritan College).
7. I was one of the co-founders (with Morris Kight and Rev. Robert Humpheries) of Christopher Street West, the largest and most successful gay pride organization in America.
8. We opened the first lobbying office in Washington, D.C. of any gay/lesbian organization in America.
9. In 1978, the U.F.M.C.C. helped settle more Cuban refugees (about 10,000) in America than any other religious group (according to Church World Services).
10. Our Churches have started one third of all the aids organizations that exist in this country.
11. At the March on Washington in 1987, U.F.M.C.C. had the largest number of marchers from any gay/lesbian organization there.
12. We have sued the United States government to gain our right to visit the prison system, and won.
13. We sued the State of California over the same issue, and won.

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14. We are in the process of building the first hospital in the world paid for by gays and lesbians, in Nigeria.
15. We have grown from 12 people meeting in the living room of my home 20 years ago to over 40,000 members and adherents of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, worldwide.
16. We have grown from one congregation (the Mother Church in Los Angeles) to 275 congregations and special works.
17. We started a dialogue with the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., that continues to this day. It can never again be 'business as usual' for denominations that purport to care about loving people as they leave gays & lesbians out. Our dialogue continues with this group of Church leaders.

20 years ago I also wrote in my book The is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay the following epilogue:

"What of tomorrow? What does the future hold for me? What does it hold for my mission in this life? Who but God can foresee the future? No one. How much of the future is foreseeable by man? Five minutes? Five months? Five years? No, none of it. Yet, I am not dismayed. I am always the complete optimist. It is my optimism that has carried me, to this point. Optimism is a gift from God; it comes through faith in Him. That is how I came through the deserts of despair and loneliness. That optimism is the means whereby I was able to find myself. It gave me the strength and the fortitude to triumph over hatred, fear, ignorance, bigotry, stupidity, and oppression. God's gift of optimism brought me to the oasis of my own acceptance of myself, to the oasis of faith, to a constantly replenishing spiritual renewal, to an absolute trust in God and in His infinite mercies.

I see obtainable goals ahead for all of us. The effects of what I started with Metropolitan Community Church are observable throughout the land. That spirit of emerging comradeship is reflected and echoed as other denominations begin to examine their own doctrine, and realize that they must make an accommodation with the gay members of their congregations. Such a move is still an all too feeble step.

I see us becoming a potent political force. In America we are changing political attitudes. Candidates for public office now actively seek our help and our endorsement. Members of my congregation join with other gay groups and become actively involved in political campaigns working on issues and giving time and effort to help elect candidates whose attitudes about us are changing. We have begun voter registration drives in the gay community. We lobby in local units of government, in state legislatures, and in Washington. We picket. We march. We demonstrate. Yes, now we are beginning to feel our own political muscle, and to show it where it counts. At long last, even gay people are running as known gays for public office.

But ahead of us lies a long, difficult battle. We must fight on the executive level, from the president on down, to change orders discriminating so disastrously against the gay

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men and women in the armed forces and in all areas of federal employment. We have to do the same thing on state and county levels, and in the cities. We have to battle for our rights in courts to change laws, and to revise the administration of justice so that we, too, can share in equal justice before the law as is supposed to be guaranteed to us by the Constitution of the United States of America!

All of this requires a long, well planned system of battle fronts. We must be prepared to go again and again through the deserts of hatred and prejudice. It will take us through the valley of the shadows where we will again be put to the test of the fire of hatred, vengeance, ignorance, and threats of violence. I shall still read in the press, see on television, and hear on my radio that gay people are being hassled, roused, beaten, unjustly jailed, unjustly tried, unjustly convicted, unjustly thrown into prison. I shall go on learning that many gay people are losing their jobs, their whole sources of income, their entire means of making a career and a living, only because they dare to risk the discovery of being gay. I will continue to be horrified by the stories of women that I counsel who have their children snatched from their breasts and are declared unfit mothers because they dare to say that they are gay and are proud! I will be revolted to learn that another gay person has been uselessly, senseless, brutally, and cold bloodedly killed just for being gay. I shall be sickened to learn that extortion still victimizes gay people. I shall walk through the fires with those who fight being gay because they don't understand and don't know what it is, with those who cannot accept it in themselves, and with those who are driven to brutal reactions when they see it in others. I will pray for them. I shall pray with all of them, and I will ask God's help that we may all join in the fraternity of the human race and learn to live in peaceable acceptance of each other, and to accommodate our differences. Then we shall have the freedom and the power to attain the mountain peaks where the air is pure and clear and winds of liberation are blowing towards the gay community -- to every gay person. Then shall we too shout from the mountain top -- just as other oppressed people have done down through the ages, as they have struggled -- that we are somebody and have a rightful place in the community of love with all liberated people!

This is my dream, I shall come to the City of God, to His Kingdom, knowing I shall be totally accepted as myself, sharing my 'being somebody' with all gay people everywhere. I dream of that time when all people who are gay, all who are hiding it, will step forth freely into the light of truth, total acceptance and understanding. I fervently dream and pray for that time when there is an end to hiding, an end to fear, an end to being victimized. I dream that we can all come out of hiding, that we can all stand tall and walk with our heads held high, because we are gay and we are proud. We will throw our arms around each other's shoulders without any shame. We will laugh together, weep together, share together, and march together. There will be an end to fear! We will stand together! We will unite! We will all know that we are God's own creatures, that He loves us, that He created us, that He blesses us, that He's proud of us, that He cares for us! We will walk with Him! All of this, I know will happen! Because we are not afraid any more!"

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My dream of 20 years ago has not been fully realized. But, praise God, we are on our way! Twenty year ago, when I founded M.C.C., I would never have dreamed of the disease of Aids which now stalks our community worse than any other in the world. I would never have dreamed that so much of our energy would be spent trying to convince my government that they had to move to help eradicate this horrible disease. I think it's a stench in the nostrils of God that we have had to demonstrate, be arrested, and be willing to be incarcerated to get the attention of the United States Government in this fight for our lives. I am thankful that, at long last, the government is having to come to terms with this deadly disease. But in the meantime, your friends and mine continue to die. There are days, I am sure, when we all feel completely helpless and feel like once again we are victimized just because of our very existence. Yet, in the middle of that despair, I am still reminded in the Scripture that God always made a way in bringing deliverance to God's people even in the darkest times. I am convinced that we will find a cure for Aids. I am convinced that, in the long run, deliverance will be ours. I am thankful for a community of loving people who do care about each other, a community that in the last twenty years has learned that they owe apologies to no one and that they will survive.

It has never been easy for the gay and lesbian community, but I believe with all of my heart deliverance will be ours. We are on our way to the promised land and nothing will stop us any more than anything could stop the children of Israel who left bondage and marched forward to a land that had been promised to them by God. They went by faith -- none of them having seen that land, but knowing it existed and it would be theirs. Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, I know with all my heart we are on our way to the promised land. Ours is in the land of humankind where we will live as the free people we are. We will love, again, making no apologies for our loving and affection. We will win against those who would seek to destroy us, including death, hell and the grave.

This last year, in some ways, has been one of utter turmoil for me. I have my mother, who has been terribly ill. I lost two friends, both gay activists who had helped and traveled with me in our struggles -- Mr. Dan Bradley, former head of Legal Services Corporation and Leonard Matlovich -- two wonderful, loving, caring persons who went to their deaths, both from Aids, with victory on their lips. My last conversation with both of my brothers was them telling me not to give up the fight -- continue the struggle.

That I plan to do.

What about tomorrow?

When the children of Israel were on their way to the promised land, they had the same bout with disease and with death and dying that we are today. At one point, serpents came into their camp and if people were bitten, they died. Moses prayed to God for deliverance. God told Moses to do a strange thing: make a bronze serpent, place it on a pole, put it in the middle of the camp -- those who look up at it will be saved.

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The reason I know there will be an end to Aids is because we, who have not been exposed to the Aids virus, know that every time we look at one of our brothers or sisters with Aids, we become more determined than ever to do what is necessary to bring health back to our community.

I am thankful that God has blessed the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. I am thankful that God has blessed the gay and lesbian community and all our heterosexual supporters. I am thankful that we are going to win the battle. The day will come when Aids will end, but we will continue our journey until all prejudice, all oppression and all violence will be stopped against us.

I have a dream for our denomination. We are here this year celebrating 20 years of ministry to those God has called us to minister to. Sometimes people wonder how we can celebrate in the middle of the oppression we still have around us. The Children of Israel were told by God, after the death angel had visited every family in Egypt at the time of what we call the Passover today, that they were to remember what God had done for them and they were to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt once a year. Even while the children of Israel were traveling for 40 years on their way to their freedom, they celebrated once a year. As the children of Israel traveled, they planned for the day when their freedom would come. I am thankful that God has given us the opportunity to celebrate this 20th year of the founding of the Mother Church and the denomination in Los Angeles, California.

I am delighted that the Mother Church has just purchased its third piece of property as it continues to be the oldest congregation in our denomination. I am thankful that the Universal Fellowship continues its wonderful, rapid growth. I am thankful God has given us the strength to start seriously discussing the building of our denominational center.

I dream of a center on enough land to accommodate a retirement center -- a retirement home for our people, a building to house the administrative offices of the U.F.M.C.C., a campus for Samaritan University, and a memorial built to the glory of God and honoring those people who have contributed to the well being of the gay & lesbian community, world wide. Being the pragmatists we are in our Church, our retirement center, at first, will be used almost entirely as a hospice for those dying of Aids. When the Aids epidemic is over, it will be utilized completely as a retirement center. I envision a memorial symbolizing the ancient symbol that the children of Israel used in their journey to freedom: that of the Tabernacle. A wonderful, beautiful, aesthetic memorial that will be the high point of our property. A memorial that will draw people, not only from our community, but from the community at large to celebrate with us the lives of those individuals who made a difference, and who, in the future, will be recognized as individuals who helped make the human family one.

We can do it.

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To know us is to love us.

I want to share through our Church center, the joy that is ours. When people come to visit our headquarters facility and our memorial, they will know that we are a community that loves so deeply.

Brothers & sisters, my message for the last then years has been "Oh yes, we can, with God's help, oh yes, we can!" My message has been: I will not permit anyone to treat me any different than the way every citizen of this earth should expect to be treated -- with dignity, with hope, with love.

Friends, together we are making the difference. Because of our determination, even in the mist of our journey we can honestly say to all the citizens of the world, we're not afraid anymore!

